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Amy Lutz

Department of Sociology, Syracuse University

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Negotiating Home Language: Spanish Maintenance and Loss in Latino Families

Amy Lutz

Based on in-depth interviews and fieldwork in and around Dallas, Texas, this paper explores the ways in which Latino parents and their children negotiate home language and offers a theoretical framework for understanding language maintenance and loss in the home. The parents in this study overwhelmingly view bilingualism as the ideal, yet many parents, especially those who are English-dominant or bilingual, find it difficult to maintain Spanish at home because of outside pressures that prioritize English and concerns about their children's English-language acquisition. The family, as the environment in which children first begin to learn language, and family dynamics regarding language are important aspects of the linguistic proficiencies of Latino children. Alba et al. (2002) argue that home language is "decisive for maintaining the mother tongue," yet little sociological research has investigated how parents and children think about and negotiate the language of home (469). Much of the previous research focuses on the ways in which different social, demographic, and individual characteristics are associated with differential language proficiencies among parents and children. However, this study explores how elements of the parents' and children's linguistic context at the micro level within the family relate to the processes of Spanish maintenance and loss.

Theoretical and Demographic Traditions on Language Maintenance and Shift

The linguistic accommodation of immigrants has often been viewed as a first step in an assimilatory path toward socioeconomic mobility in the United States (Gordon 1964; Bean and Stevens 2003). Past sociological research has conceptualized this as a trend toward English monolingualism within three generations (Fishman 1972; López 1978). In this vein, research on language incorporation of immigrants has often focused on mother tongue shift—that is, a shift from one language to another over generations—and related concepts of language preference, use, and proficiencies among immigrants and their successors (see Alba

1999; Alba et al. 2002; Li 1982; López 1978; Stevens 1986). Recent research has also included discussions of the maintenance of an ethnic mother tongue in addition to English (see Alba 1999; Espiritu and Wolf 2001; López 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Zhou and Bankston 1998). Indeed, much of the contemporary research questions the notion that full linguistic assimilation is a necessary or even beneficial step in the route to social mobility. Such research emphasizes the benefits of bilingualism relative to English monolingualism such as higher grade point averages, increased mathematical ability, lower high school dropout rates, enhanced educational achievement, greater cultural unity within the ethnic group, decreased family conflicts and greater stability in immigrant households (Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Fernández and Nielson 1986; Nielson and Lerner 1986; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Zhou and Bankston 1998; Stevens 1992; Myung-Sup Byun; García Coll and Magnuson 1997). Research on contemporary immigrant groups suggests a rapid shift to English as a usual or home language (Alba et al. 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Veltman 1988), but also a trend toward bilingualism, particularly among Latinos(as) who seem to maintain their mother tongue more readily than other immigrant groups (Alba 1999; Alba et al. 2002; López 1999; Portes and Schaufli 1994; Rumbaut 1996).¹

Integral to questions about contemporary ethnic identity and processes of language maintenance and shift across generations is a greater understanding of the processes of negotiation of home language in families. Parents play a key role in the linguistic adaptation of their children by speaking to their children in a particular language at home (see Veltman 1981; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). This negotiation is important because it reflects the processes by which parents and children make concessions and compromises in the linguistic ideals and practical goals they have for their children.

Lambert and Taylor (1990), in surveys in Detroit and Miami, have found that immigrant parents attempt to promote bilingualism among their children. However, Portes and Rumbaut (1996) find that "English monolingualism is the dominant trend among the second generation, and that preservation of fluent bilingualism is an exceptional outcome ..." (229). This may be in part related to the desire among parents for their children to speak English well. Valdés (1996), for example, finds that the Mexican-American parents in her ethnographic study place immense importance on their children's English-language acquisition because they feel that English is the key to their children's success in the

United States. A shift to English monolingualism may also reflect the immense societal pressures on immigrant and later generation families to speak English only. Buriel and De Ment (1997) suggest that immigrant parents and their offspring "adapt their socialization practices to meet the developmental challenges posed by changing family ecologies," such as immigration and pressures to acculturate (180-181; see also Harrison et al. 1990; Lin and Fu 1990). As such, many families that ideally would like for their children to be bilingual may find that their desire for their children to speak English well, along with societal influences that prioritize "accentless English" (Urcioli 1996) above all else lead to increasing use of English in the home. The process by which family members, often continually, negotiate and renegotiate home language is neither simple nor without conflict. Indeed, research points to areas of generational conflict as children grow up in a society that prioritizes US cultural norms within a family that may prioritize different cultural norms, particularly when parents and children have different linguistic proficiencies (see Kibria 1993; Rumbaut 1996; Baptiste 1993; Koplow and Messinger 1990).

Based on in-depth interviews, I present in this paper a theoretical framework for understanding the processes of home language negotiation. By highlighting the ways in which parents think about language and attempt to negotiate home language with their children, this work adds a micro-level focus on family processes that can complement the primarily macro-level research and theoretical models on language maintenance and shift. The family, as the environment in which children first begin to learn language, and family dynamics regarding language are important aspects of the linguistic proficiencies of Latino children. As such, this research explores how elements of the parents' and children's linguistic context (arguably informed by characteristics such as social class, ethnicity, settlement patterns, generation, etc.) relate to daily struggles, negotiations, and strategies about home language.

Methodology

Forty in-depth interviews of adult members of Latino families were undertaken in the Dallas, Texas metropolitan area. These interviews focused on language use, preferences, and experiences at home, at work, and in the community. Parents were asked about their hopes and strategies regarding their children's language proficiencies, as well as their perceptions of their children's language use and preferences. The inter-

views were approximately forty-five minutes to one and a half hours in duration and were conducted in English or Spanish based on the preference of the participant. The interviews were semi-structured; an interview guide was used, but other questions were asked throughout the course of the interviews for follow up. There is substantial ethnic and generational diversity in this sample to include the variety of linguistic experiences of speakers of different ethnic origins and nativity.

Participants were selected based on a modified snowball method whereby interviewees referred other participants to the study. In order to achieve variation in social networks, class, ethnicity, generation, and language skills, I contacted various organizations in and around Dallas to strategically select participants from diverse backgrounds who could then refer other participants to the study.²

Whenever possible, I tried to interview more than one family member, and made particular efforts to interview parents and their adult children. The decision to include parents of varying ages was made to understand decision-making about home language at different points in the process. Over time and stages of life, the languages used between parents and children sometimes shifted and changed, often with the interest of the children (see Tuominen 1999). Parents of young children often had much more optimism about their decisions and the possible outcomes, while the parents of adult children were more likely to say they might have done things differently. Some field notes were also taken of observations in Dallas including notes on media offerings, daily activities involving language choices, and activities focused on or targeted at the Latino population in Dallas such as church activities, English-language classes, and networking events.

In building the theoretical model, I drew heavily on participants' reports of their own and other family members' language use as well as their linguistic environments and how they think about them. Thus, one shortcoming of this research methodology may be that it does not reflect the aspects of home (and other) language negotiation that are unnoticed and unconscious. With this limitation noted, however, the inclusion of a theoretical model of language negotiation based on parents' perceptions and conceptualizations within adds a new component to the literature on mother tongue maintenance and shift.

Negotiating Home Language: A Framework for Understanding Home Language Choice

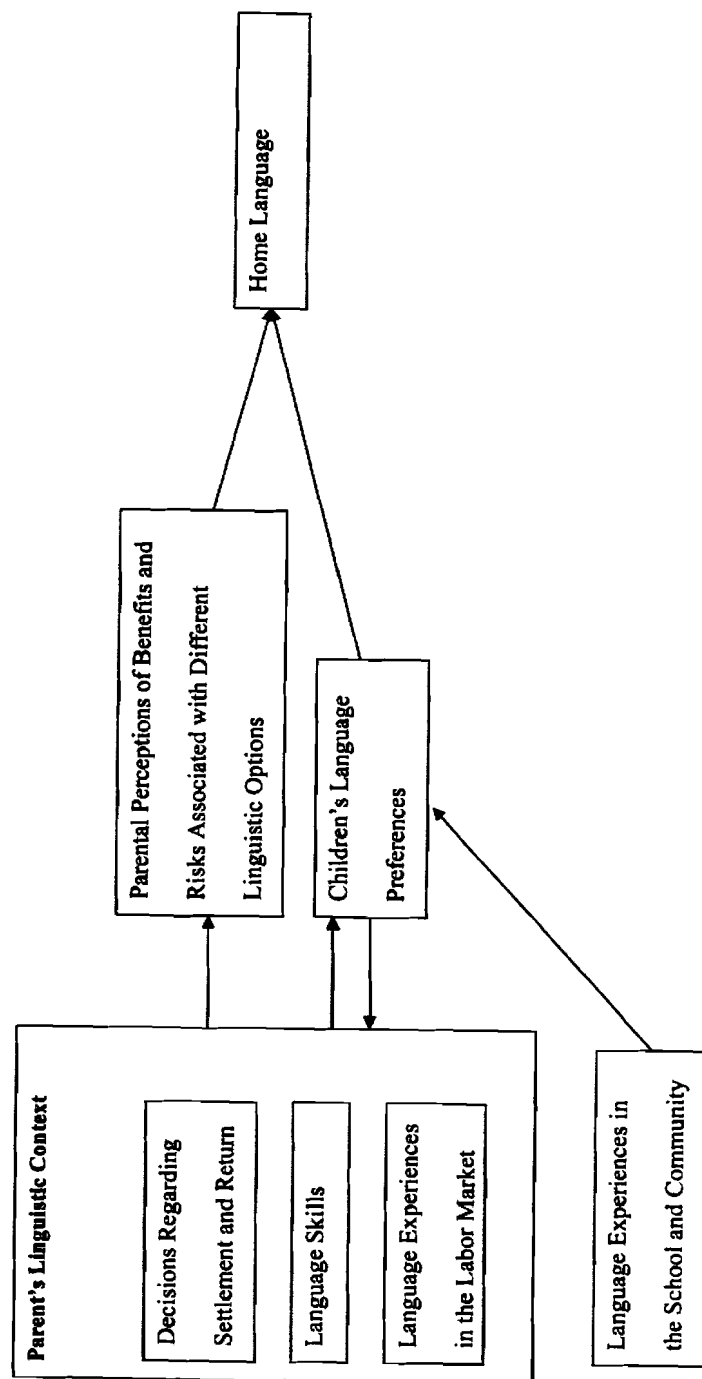
For the participants in this sample, home language—which ultimately informs children's linguistic skills, particularly in Spanish—is often a compromise between children's language preferences and parents' perceptions of linguistic ideals, options, and risks. There is, of course, considerable variation in parents' perceptions according to their own language skills, decisions regarding settlement and return, and experiences in the labor market. Figure 1 presents a framework of the elements that inform home language negotiation in households based on the interviews. On the left side of the model are the elements that frame parents' linguistic context (although it is acknowledged that generation, social class, ethnic settlement patterns and other contextual variables inform these elements).³ Parents' linguistic context informs their perceptions of the particular benefits or risks associated with different linguistic options for their children and is characterized by three elements: decisions regarding settlement and return, language skills, and language experiences in the community and labor market. Children's language preferences are informed by their parents' linguistic context, but also by the community in which they live; schools particularly seem to impact children's linguistic preferences (see also Portes and Schaufly 1994). Home language ultimately becomes a compromise between children's language preferences and parents' perceptions of benefits and risks associated with different linguistic options.

Bilingualism as an Ideal, English as a Reality

The interviews reveal that the majority of Latino parents of various socioeconomic, ethnic, generational, and linguistic backgrounds in Dallas view bilingualism as the ideal linguistic outcome for their children. Parents express their preference for bilingualism for their children in terms of two rationales: 1) bilingualism enhances the maintenance of a family and ethnic culture, and 2) bilingualism can offer their children an advantage in the labor market.

Parents cited familial reasons for maintaining Spanish at home, such as ease of communication and enhanced understanding and connectedness with their children, as well as cultural reasons such as the transmission of ethnic value systems and cultural norms that are different from those in the United States. Mrs. López, a new migrant from Mexico, says

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Negotiating Home Language



she would like to maintain Spanish within the family even in future generations, “porque es el idioma de uno” [because it is one’s language]. It is the language of one’s past, one’s culture, and one’s family. These reasons inform the hopes on the part of many, particularly first-generation parents, that the language will be maintained.

The second rationale, that bilingualism can offer their children an advantage in the labor market, reflects a feeling on the part of many parents that knowledge of Spanish has taken on an increased importance in both the Dallas economy and the international economy. While previously English was thought to be the only language that would bring successful integration and opportunity in Dallas, many parents have begun to see bilingualism as offering greater potential success for their children. This perception is no doubt linked to population dynamics of Dallas, which has witnessed a 122 percent increase in the population that identifies as Latino or Hispanic between 1990 and 2000, with those who identify as Latino or Hispanic now accounting for over 23 percent of the population in the Dallas Metropolitan Statistical Area, and about 34 percent of the central city area (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). Mrs. Hernández, a second-generation Mexican-American mother and teacher, feels a renewed importance in maintaining Spanish among her younger children.

With the older ones, I think I never even thought about encouraging them to speak Spanish. It just wasn’t that important. With the second set because there’s like eight years span between the first two.... So, the second set, I really have made a better effort—only because I saw the importance of it.... I think it has become more important.... I can see in job situations, the world is shrinking. People are, all over the world, are communicating. Just in my own husband’s job, people are sent to South America, Central America, Spain, France. They’re seeking those people who already know the language, so they don’t have to stop and train them and send you which is gonna be hard as an adult anyway.... Even in teaching itself, just in teaching. If you speak a second language you know, there’s a better chance of you getting a job than if you don’t. They need language teachers badly.

Parents of varied generational and socioeconomic status echoed these sentiments.

She's going to have a big success, especially in the United States, because the minority people or the minorities are Spanish...but as the minority increasing every year, so it's going to predominate sooner or later the Spanish people here. It's very important for her if she's going to be involved in any kind of business to speak both. It's very important. For me, it's very, very important. Like my dad when he put me in the kinder [kindergarten in Spanish] to study English [in Peru] because he say he think one day in the future you're going to learn. He said, "You need, you're going to need English." It's the same point for her (Mrs. Cáceres, Peruvian woman about her daughter).

Well, we are in Texas, this will be the second language here. It's good for them if they want to stay in Texas and plus anywhere in the States. Having at least two languages is good. Right now the rate of, as I understand, the Hispanic population is growing faster than the Asian population (Mr. Medina, island-born Puerto Rican man about his two daughters).

Citing the growth of the Hispanic/Latino population, many parents want their children to be bilinguals because they sense that Spanish, in addition to English, will provide more and better job opportunities for their children.

With the perception that Spanish is an increasingly important skill in the labor market, Mr. Lozano expresses a sentiment echoed by other first-generation parents whose children resisted learning Spanish while growing up in Texas in the 1980s:

I always wanted them to be bilingual, but I couldn't make them understand how important it would be. Now they say to me that I should have forced them to learn it.... I'm disappointed for them. It would have been more valuable for them on the job market to speak Spanish, especially now (Mr. Lozano, Mexican-American man).

However, parents of younger children faced similar resistance. Despite their stated desire to have bilingual children, many parents who are bilingual, and even those who speak limited English, find it difficult to maintain a Spanish language environment at home or choose not to. Mrs. López, who has limited English proficiency, notes that children in her extended family, even those born in Mexico, have lost their abilities

to communicate in Spanish. She says that after being in the United States for years, and establishing roots, Spanish somehow "gets lost."

Being here, it [Spanish] is lost...Practically, once you are here, it's only English (translated from Spanish).

Many parents, particularly foreign-born parents, use the same words to describe the generational shift from Spanish to English they see occurring in their families. In the context of the United States, Spanish is "lost." How is it that Spanish-speaking parents who have a desire for their children to maintain Spanish in addition to English increasingly find that Spanish is lost? What explains this? In this paper, I argue that in order to understand this process, we need to understand both parents' and children's language contexts, which include not only their linguistic skills and desires to maintain a language, but also their linguistic experiences and pressures within the community.

Linguistic Preferences of Children: Exposure to English in the School System

Tuominen's (1999) research has found that home language choices are more often driven by children than by parents. In terms of home language, school-entry is a key turning point in many families. Many parents who had established their home language to be Spanish found that upon entry to school, their children began to prefer to use English and even began to use English at home. As such, home language negotiation often occurs as parents react to the increasing amounts of English that children bring into the home as they progress through the school system. In light of the pressures exerted on children to use English in school, and the subsequent early preference children establish for using English, parents who began speaking to their children in Spanish from birth are faced with the decision of whether to shift to English or continue with Spanish upon the child's entry to school. This time, however, unlike earlier decisions about home language when their children were too young to be involved in the decision-making process, the children become active participants, often by asserting their own language preferences.

At school, children meet and become friends with other children in an English-language environment, reinforcing the use of English among peers both at school and in neighborhoods, and they begin to shift their language use to fit into that English-dominant environment. This phe-

nomenon is something that resonated with parents in this study. Many mentioned that when their children began school, they became less interested or even resistant to speaking Spanish at home. An example of this is seen in an interview with a woman from the Dominican Republic and her US-born college-age daughter.

Daughter: When I was very young, they spoke to me in both languages. As soon as I got into school, in like pre-school, kindergarten, and no one else spoke Spanish.

Mother: She said to me, "Mom, no Spanish, please."

Daughter: Yeah, I would understand it but I wouldn't speak it. Then that started going downhill. There was less and less Spanish in the house as I grew up.

In this example, the child was aware that both of her parents knew English (the father in the family is not Latino, but does speak Spanish), although the mother spoke with the daughter in Spanish prior to entering school.

Parents without high levels of English proficiency also reported a similar trend, with a variation. Their children, growing up in the United States, speak with siblings in English, sometimes against the wishes of their parents. The Cruz family is from Colombia and has been in this country for about one year. Their eight-year-old daughter has been learning English since their arrival. Although her parents prefer Spanish at home, the eight-year-old often speaks in English to her younger sister, and the parents feel that they have to constantly reinforce that Spanish is the language of the household.

We have to insist all the time on Spanish because the older girl tends to speak with [her sister] in English. Therefore we have to be all the time, all the time, "Speak in Spanish, speak in Spanish, speak in Spanish." I think that at first when she was beginning to learn English, she wanted to speak it all the time. Now it is a little better. Now she speaks with the other little one in Spanish and we have insisted that she help her to also build the same proficiency in the two languages (translated from Spanish).

Other parents cited that schools create pressure for children to speak English. In many families, particularly those in which parents are foreign-born and children are native-born, parents speak to their children

in Spanish and the children respond in English (see López 1996). Mr. Sánchez, a Mexican-born father with three daughters who were born in the United States, illustrates such a situation.

We basically spoke in Spanish, but because of peer pressure, they felt that they knew to speak more English. So, amongst themselves they spoke in English. My middle daughter basically refused to speak the language and throughout her junior [high], I guess, 7th, 8th, 9th grade, she, again because of peer pressure, she wouldn't. Like I said, we spoke to them in Spanish. They spoke back to us in English.

Similarly, Mr. Torres, from Colombia, said that he believes that the school had seventy percent of the influence on the language that children speak, while he and his wife had much less influence.

Parental Perceptions of Linguistic Ideals, Options, and Risks

Parents' reactions to children's increasing use of English are key in the process of home language negotiation and intergenerational transmission of language, and are guided by a variety of factors shaped by their own linguistic and social context. In discussing language skills and practices, the vast majority of parents presented bilingualism as the ideal, the skill that ultimately they would prefer for their children and which they associated with the most advantages. Indeed, every parent in the study viewed bilingualism positively. However, many parents' language practices at home, particularly those of bilingual parents who are highly skilled in both English and Spanish, often emphasized English proficiency. Further, bilingual parents often seemed to feel more conflicted about and face greater difficulty in transmitting dual-language proficiency to their children at home than parents with limited English proficiency. In terms of parents' conceptions of bilingualism, what distinguished parents on the topic of bilingualism was not whether they saw it as a positive outcome in general or even for their own children, but rather how positive it would be in their own children's lives in relation to the effort involved and potential payoffs and drawbacks.

The concept of *investment* in language learning is useful in terms of understanding the decisions about language made by parents for their children (see Chiswick 1991; Norton Peirce 1995). The parents I interviewed revealed two types of linguistic goals for their children, which I

will call the *ideal* and the *attainable goals*. Bilingualism may be seen as the ideal by most parents, but the “return on investment must be seen as commensurate with the effort expended on learning the second language” (Norton Pierce 1995, 17). If it is not, or the cost is too great (in terms of time, effort, conflict with children, etc.) parents may shift to what they perceive as attainable linguistic or cultural goals instead. Norton Pierce argues:

If language learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on that investment—a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources.

While Norton Pierce speaks of learning a second language in general, the same logic can be applied to the maintenance of a family mother tongue in a context where the outside society speaks another language. In this context, the investment in English proficiency is somewhat easy, given that children are exposed to English on a daily basis at school, and yields a secure payoff in the United States. The maintenance of another language, in this case, Spanish, may require considerable investment in terms of time and effort on the part of both the parents and the child.

In the context of the United States, where most children spend a large portion of their day in an English-dominant environment of school, fluent proficiency in both languages does not come without a considerable price in terms of time, effort, and potential conflict, and many parents feel unsure about the types of strategies that will lead to full proficiency in both languages. For most parents, their children’s English competency was viewed as essential (see Valdés 1996), while their Spanish competency ranged from extremely important to something “that would be nice,” but was not a priority. In some cases, parents do not feel that the additional investment in Spanish is worth the effort in the context of living in the United States and/or worry that the maintenance of Spanish may come at the expense of English. Other parents see a vital importance in maintaining Spanish and felt that their children were learning English sufficiently at school. The anticipated payoff of an investment in Spanish maintenance, as seen by these parents, reflects parents’ perceptions of risks and opportunities associated with different linguistic options informed by the particularities of parents’ linguistic context (see Figure 2). As noted in Figure 2, which indicates different

Figure 2: Perceived Risks Associated with Ideal Child Linguistic Outcome for Bilingual and Spanish-Dominant Parents

Ideal Child Linguistic Outcome	Spanish-dominant parents	
	Bilingual parents	Spanish-dominant parents
Perceived Risks	<p>Bilingualism/ Fluency in both languages</p> <p>1) Child has diminished proficiency in English</p> <p>Implication: Reduced occupational mobility</p> <p>2) Conflict with child</p> <p>3) Effort not commensurate with benefits</p> <p>4) Child has diminished proficiency in Spanish</p> <p>Implications: Potential loss of labor market advantage in some fields, Loss of family/cultural heritage Potential loss of communication with extended, but not immediate family</p>	<p>Bilingualism/ Fluency in both languages</p> <p>1) Child has diminished proficiency in Spanish</p> <p>Implications: Loss of family cohesion, Role reversal</p>

patterns for bilingual and Spanish dominant parents, parents have different perceived risks associated with pursuing ideals and attainable success for their children, and these ideal and attainable successes are shaped by social circumstances of the families. In this section I discuss the goals, benefits, and risks associated with various linguistic outcomes as perceived by bilingual, Spanish dominant, and English dominant parents. It should be noted that within my sample (similar to wider societal patterns) parents' language group also overlapped with socioeconomic status. In most cases the Spanish-dominant group was of lower socioeconomic status than the other two language groups.

Parents' Linguistic Context

By virtue of their circumstances, settlement patterns, generation and social class, Latino parents are immersed within a particular linguistic context, defined by their language skills in English and Spanish, their decisions about whether they will settle or have settled permanently in the United States or plan to return to their countries of origin at some point, and their experiences regarding the meaning of English and Spanish in the community in which they live, particularly in the labor market. This linguistic context informs decisions about home language (not only in terms of the linguistic skills parents have to pass on to their children, but also the ways in which parents feel about the importance of particular language skills in terms of their children's success in the United States and/or a country of origin) and their potential risk of loss of parental authority or intra-family communication.

Parents' language skills inform the language(s) they can transmit to their children at home. For Mrs. Pérez, the question of which language to speak at home was not a difficult one because she only recently started to learn English. She was, however, concerned about her older son's acquisition of English when he began school.

I'm in a worry about he speaks only Spanish because we never try to learn English in this country because we come in illegal.

Other parents view linguistic skills in terms of a division of labor between homes and schools, with parents transmitting Spanish, and schools transmitting English.

English is for the teacher. Spanish I can teach her at home, but English is for her [the teacher]. What I did was this...put her in a class where they speak only English, because Spanish, she already has Spanish. She has learned it, but as my husband

suggested, the best thing is Spanish at home and English there [at school] (Mrs. López, Mexican migrant, translated from Spanish).

The linguistic skills of parents also tended to be associated with broader patterns of intergenerational transmission of language, related to language skills, but also metalinguistic. As one might suspect, negotiation of home language is a process that is most salient for bilingual parents, who have more linguistic options to negotiate and renegotiate with children, but is not as straightforward as it seems for other linguistic groups.

Two Home Language Trends: English Definitely, Spanish Maybe, or "Insisting" on Spanish at Home

Bilingual parents, in discussing language skills and practices, often presented bilingualism as the ideal, the skill that ultimately they would prefer for their children, and which they associated with the most advantages. Parents know that only English is emphasized at school, and if their children are to become proficient in Spanish, they will have to gain that proficiency at home. Ideally, this would result in bilingualism and high proficiency in both languages. However, many bilingual parents' language practices at home were more geared toward the attainable goal of high-level English proficiency with an outcome of English monolingualism or English dominance with more limited Spanish proficiency. Another group of bilingual parents tried to maintain Spanish, but found it difficult and noted that English often emerged in family conversation despite their best efforts.

Bilingual parents who chose not to emphasize Spanish appeared to express this choice in two key ways. Some parents, particularly those for whom English acquisition has been a struggle, perceive that by emphasizing Spanish at home to achieve the ideal of bilingualism, their children may lose out on the attainable goal of high-level English proficiency (and unaccented English), seen as essential to their children's success in the United States. Another set of parents did not perceive that the benefits of bilingualism outweighed the effort involved in terms of time and potential conflict with children. These two groups of parents may consciously decide to emphasize English or at least not insist on Spanish at home.

Parents' own struggles with language also inform the ways in which they would like their children's experiences to be different from their

own. Mr. Medina, for example, wants his daughters to be bilingual, and he emphasizes English at home with his daughters because learning English has been a struggle for him.

Because of the challenges in my life to speak English, I wanted them to be proficient in English first. I wanted them to know English and that's basically what we spoke. Maybe one word over here, over there [in Spanish] but nothing major, basically it was English. I found like in the other Hispanic homes, they speak a lot of Spanish...a lot. The minority, they try to do both, but I was doing basically English, English, English. Well, we live here...they need to know that language, have mastered the language (Mr. Medina, island-born Puerto Rican man).

In discussing his linguistic interactions with his daughters, Mr. Medina reveals a certain angst and indecision that many parents feel about language choices made with and for their children and whether they will benefit their children in the long run. He tells his daughter:

"You're young. You are nine years old. You can still learn. I'm still learning things. If you want to do it, you can do it and I'll help you." It's probably my fault.

Mr. Medina, like many bilingual parents, felt willing to let his children pursue the ideal on their own (such as in language courses at school), and even help them in doing so, but do not insist on or actively encourage Spanish at home. Thus, even among bilingual parents who view bilingualism as the ideal in general, and for their children, many parents more often pursue strategies that emphasize English at home with their children.

Another group of bilingual parents "insist" on Spanish at home, but maintaining this policy can be difficult for them. For example, Mr. Torres notes that he and his wife try to maintain only Spanish at home, but occasionally use English with their children. When speaking to his children in Spanish, his rule is:

If they respond in English, I stay quiet until they respond in Spanish. Then they speak Spanish. It's part of the problem. It's part of the process (Mr. Torres, Colombian migrant, translated from Spanish).

However, such a system requires constant vigilance. When asked how often his children tend to respond in English, he responded, "almost

always." While his children do speak Spanish, he believes they have greater fluency in English than in Spanish:

They speak Spanish, but now I think that's changing...The oldest uses more English because he's with friends that speak only English (translated from Spanish).

Thus, for bilingual parents, "insistence" on using Spanish at home as a policy is somewhat flexible and potentially allows for at least some English use at home. For these parents home language can require constant negotiation with children who desire to speak English at home, despite their parents' preference to speak in Spanish.

Parents who spoke little or no English did not perceive the same kinds of dilemmas regarding speaking Spanish at home that bilingual parents did. The risk of allowing English to become the household language (driven by child language preferences) was loss of effective parent/child communication and role reversal. While few parents described their family language strategies in these terms, they describe their "insistence" on Spanish with their children in terms that focused on preservation of the family and the special culture of the family. For bilingual parents, the stakes of Spanish loss are not as high; the loss of Spanish among their children may involve some decreased opportunities and present a communication barrier with extended family members and others, but not immediate family members.

English-Dominant Latinos(as): "Relearning" Spanish and Latino(a) Identities Without Spanish

An important segment of the Latino population is not included in Figure 2, namely English-dominant Latinos(as). The majority of English-dominant parents do not speak Spanish with their children simply because English is their primary language. Over generations, ties to the home country weaken and decisions regarding home language lose the relevancy they had for first- and second-generation families (see Fishman 1972). Later-generation participants report they are predominately English speakers (see Alba et al. 2002; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation 2002). For many later-generation Latinos(as), Spanish is seen as part of an ethnic background or culture, but not part of one's own personal or even ethnic identity. Gabriela is fourth generation and for the most part, has grown up using English:

The people closest to me don't speak Spanish, don't use Spanish, but at the same time, that's our background. So

there's times when I'm kind of—I don't know...I really don't know because I think about it and if I never ever learned a word of Spanish I would still be able to communicate with everybody in my family—the same with them—the same with my grandmother.

Many later-generation Latino adults cited other elements of ethnic identification such as food and participation in ethnic events (see Alba 1988; Gans 1979). Some express hopes for their children to learn Spanish, but most often as an endeavor for children to pursue on their own or in school.

Recontact with the language and culture of new Spanish-speaking immigrants (see Cisneros and Leone 1983; Weinreich 1967), has inspired some members of the third and later generations to “relearn” a heritage language used intermittently as a child, or never used. While some third and later generation parents are in the process of “relearning” Spanish, largely because of the increased presence of Spanish in the Texas labor market, they see the prospects of passing the language on to their children as slim.

As far as the language, I'd really love to be able to pass on the language to them, but I'm not quite there (Mr. Beltrán, third-generation Mexican-American).

Thus, for English-dominant parents, English is the home language, and parents who promote biculturalism think about it primarily in terms other than language.

Nonlinguistic Aspects of Parental Language Context

While language skills are a very important factor, other issues are also important in determining how parents think about language and the kinds of language skills they would like for their children. These are particularly salient themes for bilingual parents for whom continued “investment” in Spanish at home is more highly dependent upon these types of nonlinguistic contextual factors.

Settlement and Return

Parents also draw on their own expectations about whether they intend to settle permanently in the United States or return to the country of origin. As transnational options become more available and inexpensive, particularly for Mexicans, for whom a return to the country of origin may be as easy as a trip by bus or car, the permanency of migra-

tion or settlement comes into question. Many of the first-generation immigrants had been to the United States for extended periods of time, gone back to their country of origin, and returned once again to the United States. Others cite visits to a country of origin as a way for US-born children to maintain contact with the language and culture of the home country. Many of those who have settled and have children, and even grandchildren, in the United States talk seriously about moving back to their countries of origin, particularly to retire. Such is the case with Mr. and Mrs. Pérez who have some property in Mexico and visit once or twice a year with their two children and a dream of returning someday to live. Mrs. Pérez wants her sons to speak English well so that they can graduate from school, but also wants them to speak Spanish to communicate with her and other relatives. She uses Spanish with her children at home, and leaves English for the teachers.

Among first-generation parents, those who have shifted to only or mostly English at home have largely done so with the idea that they have settled permanently in the United States. Such is the case with the Quirós family. Although both parents speak Spanish, when they made the decision that they would permanently settle in the United States rather than living in Latin America, they also decided that they would speak to their children only in English.

Our intention all along was for the kids to grow here in the United States and to be part of this society. I don't think we would change anything as far as just bringing the kids mostly speak in English as a first language. It's, you know...it's nice if they could speak in Spanish, but I think the effort and the confusion and stuff like that, I think is too much for me for it to be worth it. Mainly, as we are just in touch with my family so seldom, you know. Maybe, I mean if we lived in Calexico, for example, you know, or Mexicali, you know, in Calexico, El Centro, or Tijuana and my relatives were right there across the border and they are in constant communication—absolutely. My relatives come and visit us once every five years or we go there every five years. I don't think it's worth it—the effort that it will take to force the kids, actually or to encourage them to speak fluent Spanish (Mr. Quirós, Colombian migrant).

In this family, speaking English at home reflects the permanency of the decision to settle in the United States. It also reflects the belief that English will be the primary route for the children's occupational and socioeconomic aspirations.

Parents' Experiences in the Labor Market

Parents' own experiences in the Dallas community and labor market come into consideration in home language negotiation, particularly when parents feel that language skills in English and/or Spanish have or would have benefited or hindered them. Parents' experiences in the labor market are particularly important for those who have or who intend to settle permanently in the United States because it gives parents a sense of the value of language skills for their children's future socioeconomic mobility. The relationship between English and Spanish in the Dallas labor market is a complex one in which English offers the primary route to success in the workplace, but increasingly Spanish has become an asset as well. Although use of Spanish is viewed with suspicion and contempt in the English-only environment of some workplaces, in other businesses bilinguals are in demand to communicate with Spanish-speaking customers or to provide translation. While many new immigrants struggle to gain the English skills they need to ensure success in the United States, the large influx of new Spanish speakers has created a demand in the workforce for Spanish-speaking professionals and low-level workers in health care, insurance, education, and service as well as in international firms that have clients or offices in Latin America. Mr. Sánchez, a first-generation Mexican-American father, discusses how bilingualism has helped him in his career, and has tried to stress the importance of being bilingual to his daughters.

From the very beginning, when I went back to Mexico in 1962, the only reason I was given the job was the fact that I spoke English. Then when I came back to Dallas, one of the reasons I was given the job at the hotel was the fact that I spoke Spanish. It worked both ways. This company that I'm with now... I began as a collector because I was bilingual. I would say twenty to thirty percent of their accounts were of people that either owned or leased cars [from this company] and in order for us to communicate...it has always benefited me and it's something that I... that I have told my daughters, "Learn your Spanish well. Of course don't forget your English because you have to use it every day." I think it has helped them all along throughout their lives and their careers.

New opportunities for bilinguals have fostered an atmosphere in which parents, such as Mr. Sánchez, believe that speaking Spanish may

provide lucrative career opportunities for their children both in the local job market and in the global marketplace. This was particularly the case for those working in entrepreneurial pursuits, for whom speaking Spanish meant access to a larger customer base.

However, the labor market context in Dallas is one where Spanish is often desired among employees, yet less often rewarded. While the demand for bilinguals in the labor market obviates the notion of Spanish as an economic resource for many of the parents interviewed, their own experiences in the labor market indicate that speaking Spanish can hold them back because of discrimination and because of more demands on their time at work for unrewarded activities such as translation requests not associated with their immediate job requirements. Mrs. Aguilar, who works in a medical setting, describes her experiences:

I feel like I'm not getting promoted like other people and sometimes I'm thinking my pronunciation is not as good, like they think that my skills are not as good because of it.... New people come and I train them and they get promoted and I was the one who trained them. That's why I feel I have been discriminated. One time I was talking on the phone with my husband, when I get excited, I don't know.... My coworker said, "You need to speak English. You are American. You need to speak English." I said to her that you know that in America there is more than one language, not just English, more than one culture.

While in this case, Mrs. Aguilar's coworker responded to her personal call in Spanish with reproach, in other situations coworkers ask her to provide language assistance in cases where patients do not speak English, in essence creating a double standard in terms of the "appropriateness" of speaking Spanish at work. Although she feels her language skills have provided a beneficial service to her employer, Mrs. Aguilar also feels that being a Spanish speaker might hold her back in her career. Even in jobs where bilingualism provides a valuable service for employers, respondents noted that the skill is often taken for granted, and rarely means financial rewards of promotions except in entrepreneurial activity, or in the case of highly skilled professionals. As such, the labor market while presenting bilingualism as an ideal, also serves to reinforce the notion among parents that the mastery of English is the most important in terms of the labor market success of Latino children.

Home Language as a Compromise

Ultimately, home language represents a compromise between parental perceptions of risks and benefits of children's language skills, which lead them toward strategies of language maintenance or shift at home, and children's linguistic preferences. In many families, such a compromise results in parents using one language, and children using another.

The often low-income Spanish-dominant families were more likely to pursue the ideal of bilingualism because they did not see the same risks that the middle- and working-class parents did in Spanish maintenance (restricted occupational mobility or effort and conflict with children), while they had different risks associated with Spanish loss (loss of family cohesion and parental control). Spanish-dominant parents have a greater stake in maintaining Spanish as a home language, even for use among children, because without Spanish maintenance parent-child communication can be lost. For both English dominant and bilingual parents who plan to settle permanently in the United States, the importance placed on English mastery, coupled with children's increasing preference for English upon school entry, leads to a greater role of English at home over time. Even bilingual parents whose parents try to maintain Spanish at home find that over time children often persist in responding in English. Those who plan to return to a country of origin or visit frequently may place greater emphasis on Spanish at home than those who plan to settle permanently, but also face similar language dilemmas.

Conclusion

In this sample of Latino parents living in Dallas, Texas, parents view bilingualism positively both in general terms and for their own children, and all place a great importance on their children's mastery of English. However, investment in Spanish skills through use of Spanish as a home language is difficult to maintain, especially for bilingual or English-dominant parents, because community elements often discourage Spanish use and maintenance. Spanish maintenance at home involves a large investment of time, commitment, and struggles with children who spend most of their time in the English-dominant worlds of school and friends. Parents who want to use Spanish with their children at home note the large influence that schools have on children's preference for English. Schools reinforce the use of English among youngsters not only at school, but also among friends and siblings. As such, the high hopes associated with bilingualism are met by a difficult investment in Spanish,

given the pressures on children to speak English at school and the tenuous rewards in the labor market. In Dallas, bilingual and English-dominant parents find that maintaining Spanish at home is a difficult prospect, and that across generations, Spanish is increasingly "lost."

The theoretical model of home language negotiation advanced in this paper can help to explain how and why Spanish is increasingly "lost" in families where parents speak Spanish. It is argued that emphasizing English or Spanish at home presents different risks and opportunities for parents with different linguistic contexts. For Spanish-speaking parents who speak English poorly or not at all, the risk of allowing English at home is loss of communication and parental authority. In this sense they are able and willing to "insist" upon the use of Spanish at home, even in their children's interpersonal communication, and thus have an easier route to intergenerational language transmission than bilingual parents.

For parents who speak English well, in addition to Spanish, bilingual competency among parents ensures that there is little risk of loss of communication with their children. These parents are presented with a choice between ensuring mastery of English or bilingual competency (mastery of English and Spanish). For these parents the lack of English mastery is the greatest risk. While they would prefer their children to be bilingual, they view English as important in terms of labor market opportunities and ultimate success for their children in the United States. The pressure to use English as a home language becomes even further magnified by children's shifting preference toward English upon school entry, when the insistence upon Spanish can mean increased conflicts with children who prefer to use English. As such, the perceived risk of lack of English mastery coupled with the children's preference for English for some parents can make it difficult to maintain a Spanish-language environment at home for bilingual and English-dominant parents. Others question whether the effort is worth it because the time and potential for conflict do not seem worth the payoff unless the child exhibits a particular interest. For bilingual parents who "insist" on Spanish at home, children can often negotiate greater use of English over time, in part because their parents speak both languages.

Further research is warranted on the processes of language adaptation of Latinos(as) in the United States. The experiences of these participants offer insight on the roles of family and community context in family language negotiation that might be investigated in other communities as well as in future survey research. It remains to be seen whether this theoretical model extends beyond the Dallas area, or even beyond this par-

ticular group of informants. Survey research on language is particularly needed to understand whether these types of findings and framework might be reflective of general processes on language decisions among Latino parents or parents from other ethnic groups. Ideally, a representative survey that includes measures of language proficiency among parents and children, individual and contextual level demographic data, and measures of parental opinion on language maintenance and shift, should be part of future research in this area.

Syracuse University
aclutz@maxwell.syr.edu

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Notes

¹ According to the 2002 National Survey of Latinos, 24% of the first generation, 47 percent of the second generation, and 22 percent of third and later generations are bilingual (Pew Hispanic Center 2002).

² Of the forty respondents, twelve were of Mexican ancestry, five of whom were born in the United States and seven of whom were born in Mexico. Ten respondents were from Peru, eight were from Colombia, six were of another origin—primarily Caribbean islanders. Also included were four bilingual non-Latinos/as of European ancestry who were spouses of a Latino(a). There was also substantial within-group racial/ethnic variation, particularly in the South American groups. Because both Peru and Colombia are multi-ethnic societies, migrants from those countries included Spanish-speaking people of European, Asian, African, and indigenous ancestry. Participants were selected from two health and social service organizations, a church, and three language schools (two oriented toward teaching English as a second language, and one that offered Spanish as a second language). In each of the organizations, participants were selected, and referrals solicited from both organizational staff (doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, pastors, etc.) and clientele (students, patients, clients, congregation members). In all, six respondents were solicited from religious organizations, twenty-five from the three language schools, seven from the two health and social service organizations, and three from other sources. By starting the snowball sample with both staff and clientele from different types of organizations, I could achieve variation in social networks, social class, generation, and ethnicity. Perhaps because of their interest in the topic of study, participants who entered the sample through the three language schools were more likely

to refer me to personal acquaintances, friends, and family members outside of the organization. The interviews and solicitation of new participants from both the staff and clientele of the organizations were intended to provide diversity in the sample along the lines of social class and language skills. In general, the organizations' staff members were more likely to have greater fluency in English and to be of higher social class than the clientele. However this was not always the case and some exceptions are particularly worth mentioning. Students, particularly in one school, included some relatively well-off migrants who use the linguistic training to transition into professional positions in the United States. Conversely, a few staff members interviewed had very low income or limited English, such as janitors or professionals who were new migrants. All in all, respondents included teachers, janitors and maids, factory workers, restaurant personnel, students, doctors, engineers, and retailers.

³ As is well documented in previous research (see Alba et al. 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Lieberman and Curry 1971; Stevens 1985; Stevens 1992), I also find evidence that parental linguistic context is informed by differences in context of settlement and individual-level differences among families, such as generation, social class, race, and ethnicity, but because of the micro-level focus of the interviews an investigation of these differences is largely beyond the scope of this paper.

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